



WE ASKED:

“What is needed to ensure school reopenings are safe and equitable for children and families who are most impacted by COVID-19?”

The Family Voices United campaign brings together the voices of young people, birth parents, and relative caregivers with lived experience in the child welfare system to drive change in foster care. Learn more at familyvoicesunited.org.

Why ensuring school reopening is safe and equitable for youth and families during school reopening?

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed alarming inequalities in our educational system from technology access to critical support families need to support their children from housing to healthcare. As the many states in the United States consider reopening schools whether in person or continue in remote learning (or somewhere in between), planning for reopening is an opportunity to re-examine, transform, and improve our education system to center our most vulnerable families and students. The voices of kinship caregivers, birth parents, current and former foster youth will provide insight to Policymakers and administrators on their needs,



FAMILY VOICES UNITED

A collaborative project of The Alliance for Children's Trust & Prevention Funds, FosterClub, and Generations United with support from Casey Family Programs.

strategies, and supports needed to reopen to prioritize the social, mental, and physical safety during the reopening process.

Some key themes that came out of the responses we received to this question:

- Prioritizing the social emotional well-being of students and families who are returning back to school.
- Reducing class sizes for in person learning and providing equal access to technology platforms to support families engaging in online learning
- Dedicated staff capacity to develop partnerships with families and their communities to address COVID-19 impact on housing, employment, mental health and other areas of needs, to provide ongoing communication and support.
- Tracking systems to identify the spread, infection rate and risk of COVID-19 on children participating in in person learning.

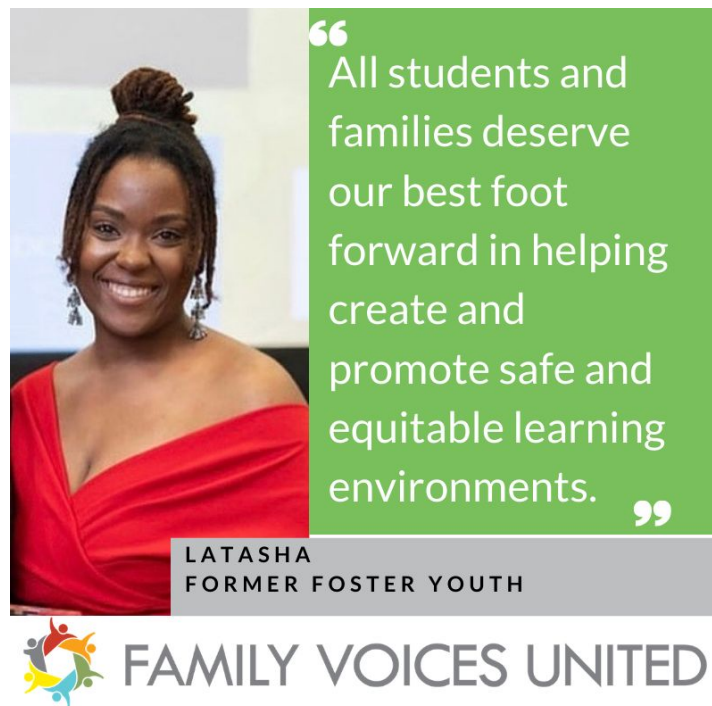
Here is what young people, parents and kinship caregivers said...

Having children be able to learn in pods seems to be an equitable option for families; however, for many families the financial aspect puts this out of their reach. **Caregivers also need to be instructed on how to implement all of the learning platforms the children utilize.** Without knowledge of the platforms, it is almost impossible to support the students.

Olivia Relative Caregiver, from District of Columbia with DC Grandparent Caregiver's Program

To ensure school reopening is safe and equitable for children and families first and foremost we as grandparents caring for grandchildren need a 'clear message' from our community leaders. When an Education Commissioner states "we will reopen only if the science and data say it's safe to do so" and in the same meeting a Governor states that "schools are ready for full in-person learning, and then; a School Department Municipality states they "can not meet the state requirements for opening of schools" it's confusing! **Without a clear, concise message across the board it is difficult to make an informed decision about whether or not it is safe and equitable for children to return to schools and families to plan accordingly.**

Magdalena Andreozzi, Relative Caregiver from Rhode Island



As a Graduate Student and former Foster Youth, **it is imperative that school reopenings are safe and equitable for families that have been most impacted by COVID-19.** School counselors, teachers, principals, case managers, therapists, resource & community outreach workers must identify students who prior to COVID-19 were already facing challenges to have a group to start with. Once that list has been identified they must **continuously reach out to those children and families to assess and construct a plan of how to gather resources and information to help those families and be a point of contact for those students as a team.**

Also, with the onset of COVID-19 **all students and their respective families enrolled must have an opportunity to identify if they are in need,** which can be in a online form or help #. **School officials, teachers, and community workers alike must work as a team in these unprecedented times to ensure that students and children have wraparound support** as they complete both virtual and in person learning for this 2020-2021 school year.

If one child or family is left behind, we all are left behind, and that just simply cannot happen. All students and families deserve our best foot forward in helping create and promote safe and equitable learning environments.

Natasha, Former Foster Youth from North Carolina

If schools are going to physically open up there need to be a change in class size this may mean allowing children to be placed in categories to be in school on certain days then the next category of children come on other specified days. This is the only way i can think of to

decrease class size and promote social distancing until we are in front of this Pandemic.

Tawanda Harris, Relative Caregiver from Pennsylvania

“To make sure the children go to school with a positive outlook , may there parents make sure that they do there part by being there for the young ones to the older kiddos , as a parent I feel as though if we’re doing our part making sure our kids and ourselves are protected what do we have to lose. **Working as a family and a community we can fight this fight.”**

Veronica, Parent from California

Grandparents raising Grandchildren with special needs is hard enough. Now we're expected to become teachers, **adding more stress which can lead to sickness, more doctor visits and possibly, hospitalizations.** Kids are smart and need the challenges school teachers provide. Our grandson bloomed last year in kindergarten with the help of his teacher and counselor, he excelled far greater. Not only will he **not have that classroom experience now, but he will also miss the camaraderie and friendships formed. That could be a detriment to his learning and progression of his education. That's not something we want..”**

Catherine, Relative Caregiver from Connecticut

A cure, medication to help infected people, a vaccine that is shown to work,, or lower numbers of people becoming infected.

Parent, from West Virginia

When taking into consideration **the vulnerability of older adults who are kinship care providers who have custody/guardianship/adoption of youth returning to school. Their health and well-being needs to be considered.** Many kinship care providers are also raising children with special needs who do not tolerate online screen learning and need a hands-on approach to learning. **Many kinship caregivers are raising children with Individual Education Plans IEP/504's that need to be considered. How is the school going to support their needs and how these children are going to access the same education as their peers.**

Consideration needs to be for the parents/caregivers that do not have training in special education and how they are going to provide the structure and support for these children when school teachers are not accessible. **How are they going to cope with the challenges, behavior, and mental health all while not allowing their child to fall behind academically further than they already are?** And for those families that are single parents, those that are working (some from home) how are they going to cope with the schedule of two jobs at once?

Gail Engel, Relative Caregiver from Colorado with Larimer County Thompson School District SEAC Council

As a guardian/grandmother, I am sure my granddaughter will do great with the mask. But **washing hands, not roughing others or others belongings is a concern for my 6 yr old.**

Keith Lowhorne, Parent from Alabama with Alabama Foster and Adoptive Parent Association.

classroom and school cleaning, keeping kids in smaller “pods”

Relative caregiver from Colorado

No new cases 14 days or more, **as a teacher, and foster parent/parent I know many other children are in challenging physical health positions.”**

Parent, Former Foster Youth from West Virginia

School districts will need to provide additional cleaning of touch points, teach social distancing and hand washing, and curtail contact activities where the risk is greater.

However personal responsibility is also a factor. Families must provide masks and water bottles for the children, keep sick children at home, and reinforce good hygiene.”

Roberta Edgar, Relative Caregiver from Pennsylvania

“Don’t open school until this new year to make sure the kids are safe. The reality is, you don’t know who is sick and who isn’t sick. There is concern that **schools don't have the capacity to check all the children that come into the school.** How are they going to check all the teachers to see if they are not sick? What’s going to happen if one kid or teacher gets sick? **How are they going to close down the school fast enough to make sure everyone is ok. That’s my main concern”**

Kenya Franklin, Parent from New York with Rise Magazine

There is NOTHING available that will make it safe and equitable to reopen schools. **Opening schools puts everyone involved at risk - from the bus driver to the cafeteria to all the teachers, students, families, extended families.** To open schools at this point in time is absolutely not warranted.

Relative Caregiver from Kansas



FAMILY VOICES UNITED

About the Family Voices United campaign

The Campaign elevates the voices and perspectives of young people, parents, and kinship caregivers, collectively known as family voices or “constituent voices”. Individuals with lived experience in the child

welfare system are currently sharing their stories and expertise to educate, inform and transform the systems that serve children, youth and families - both in policy and practice. With new federal legislation - the Family First Prevention Services Act - states, tribes, and territories have new opportunities to implement changes that many constituents have identified are needed to fully support keeping children safe in strong, supported families.

Join the movement! Sign up at FamilyVoicesUnited.org